



ePrints

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Wicked Game

| Artist Nick Fox's ongoing project^s, 'The Longing Archive' and the associated 'Longing Disco', interact with communities and individuals, gathering stories and tokens of love and loss to chart the emotional spectrum of longing. Communication is of course key to the success of relationships but how, he wonders, is this affected by mediated modes of communication and expression?

*The world was on fire and no one could save me but you
It's strange what desire will make foolish people do
I'd never dreamed that I'd meet somebody like you
I'd never dreamed that I'd lose somebody like you*

*No I don't want to fall in love (this girl is only gonna break your heart)
No I don't want to fall in love (this girl is only gonna break your heart)*

Chris Isaak *Wicked Game* (1989)

Cultural historian Magdalena Waligórska describes music as 'perhaps the medium most commonly employed in the service of the grand narratives that underpin collective identities'¹. While music enables us to communicate indirectly, a song's dialectal content proffers manifold meaning and expression. The way that the pop song evokes profound human emotion, is multi-layered; equally joyful and tragic, a cathartic insight into a sense of self and other, of belonging to and alienation from a social group and community, a vehicle for admiration or reproach, a literal or symbolic message. Significantly, songs can be employed to share emotional knowledge and experience where the usual assembly and delivery of language cannot. A love letter can sometimes be a hollow echo of a song's amorously acquired meaning or arduous memory. When shared through a range of social activities like dance or music sharing platforms, it creates a sort of social glue, allowing participants to negotiate personal identities, communicate and construct group identities and in so doing creates the very opportunity, be it physical or virtual, within which the experience of belonging can be created.

'The longing for a destiny is nowhere stronger than in our romantic life'²
Alain de Botton, *Essays in Love*

Whether collective or individual, longing encapsulates many things: inconsolable ache, disappointment, fear, distance, but also the possibility of fulfilment, of belonging, of hope and ultimately of love. But what of the individual narratives that ignite and flicker into life at the axes of these conditions or emotions?

In the first rush of romance and only a few short weeks after meeting my partner we started sending each other links to songs on YouTube. I guess this was a mutual way of making sense of our growing yet unspoken desires; hope love, fulfilment, and the bittersweet dread of it all falling apart. Chris Isaak's Wicked Game (1989), Billy Ocean's Red Light Spells Danger (1977), Sade's Cherish the Day (1992) and Olivia Newton John & ELO's Xanadu, all formed part of our mixtape of seduction. The songs partly functioned as proxy

for the act of writing a love letter- a symbolic extension of the body and a transmitter of the sentiment it communicates. Pinging emails and links to each other was more immediate, more descriptive of personal likes and dislikes, sometimes frustratingly obscure. After listening to the song, I would privately pour over each word of the lyrics in exquisite dread. What would he let slip? Was I going to look a fool for falling so hard, so deeply, so quickly (again)?

With much of the world continually in the grip of social and political upheaval, our nature is to unite for shared purpose. The Internet revolution has shifted not only models of communication but also our readiness to socially and emotionally connect to one another. We are more empowered through virtual personalities and linked to each other in our everyday lives through social media, SMS, e-mail and freely communicate our most intimate of confessions digitally. The Emoticon³, a modest relation of the Victorian floral tussie-mussie⁴, has been successfully incorporated into even the most casual displays of online affection, indicating for the individual, an enduring longing to communicate matters of the heart in and beyond our romantic lives.

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Amassed, these snippets of emotional signs indicate society's adaptability in it's capacity to connect even when coming together no longer means only physically. Our natural disposition to relate emotionally to one another as well as our inventiveness in developing symbolic language to communicate intimacy across the emotional spectrum, help us to repurpose and reconstruct traditional social networks and vocabularies into new ways of sharing and of belonging.

Communication is very different to true emotive connection or haptic embrace. What do we expect of each other in our parallel real lives where interpersonal relationships are so complex, so demanding and so messy? In mediating our emotional connections through technology could it be, as Sherry Turkle suggests, that we have accidentally 'sacrificed face-to-face conversation for mere *connection*'?⁵ What is uncertain is whether or not we need to put down our tablets and switch off our virtual personalities to deepen personal engagement and emotional connection. What *is* certain is that the digital revolution has accelerated the process by which music connects personal and cultural experience, place and even community, with, as ethnomusicologist Martin Stokes describes 'an intensity, power and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity.'⁶

In counterpoint to this threat of accidental disconnect, the itinerant *Longing Disco* project brings together individuals to share personal memory, music and song. Participants submit song requests connected to personal and unique stories that chronicle their blissful courtships, tragic romances, unrequited loves, loss, hopes and dreams. Submitted songs are played at the live events, while the accumulated stories are accessioned to The Longing Archive, a depository for the ephemera of longing and all its associated narratives.

Shaped by its contributors, the participatory *Longing Disco* provides a platform upon which the experience of belonging is formed, documented and archived, forming transient communities that celebrate the power of music and song to evoke a cultural and personal longing that can unite us all.

Reading the lyrics No I don't want to fall in love with somebody like you, was a stab in the guts. Later he confessed that he has misheard its meaning as the

'don't' was silently sung. He was mortified, and it made me love him more deeply⁷.

Anonymous contributor, *The Longing Disco* (an imprint of *The Longing Archive*)

¹ Magdalena Waligórska's introductory essay Music and the Boundaries of (Non)Belonging, *Music, Longing and Belonging: Articulations of the Self and the Other in the Musical Realm*, (Ed) Magdalena Waligórska Cambridge Scholars Publishing (2013, 2)

² Alain de Botton *Essays in Love*, Picador, (1993, 1).

³ The Emoticon, short for Emotion & icon, is a pictorial representation of facial expression commonly used in, and developed alongside social media platforms to indicate the senders verbal communication or temper emotional meaning.

⁴ Fin de siècle interests in underground floriographic languages, spawned the widespread development of codified dictionaries of flower meaning, exemplified by Kate Greenaway's 1884 *The Language of Flowers*. This socially constructed vocabulary ascribed complex symbolic meaning to flowers given and received in courtship including the tussie-mussie, a small flower bouquet generally worn on the lapel.

⁵ Described by technology and society expert Sherry Turkle in her book *Alone Together* (2011) Sherry Turkle. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less From Each Other*, Basic Books 2012. (also quotes from TED talk, Feb 2012)

⁶ Martin Stokes. 1994. Introduction: Ethnicity, identity and music.

In *Ethnicity, identity and music: The musical construction of place*, ed. M. Stokes, 1-27. Oxford: Berg.

⁷ [More information on the Longing Disco can be found at www.nickfoxart.com](http://www.nickfoxart.com)